

Language

classmate

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Language is the 'species-specific' and 'species-uniform' possession of man. It is God's special gift to mankind. Without language human civilization as we now know it, would have remained an impossibility. Language is ubiquitous. It is present everywhere in our thoughts and dreams, prayers and meditations, relations and communications, and sanskars and rituals. Language dissipates superfluous nervous energy, directs motion in others, both men and animals, set matter in motion as in charms and incantations, transfer knowledge from one person to another and from one generation to another. Language is also the maker or unmaker of human relationships. It is the use of language that makes a life bitter or sweet. Without language man would have remained only a dumb animal.

Since linguistics is the study of language, it is imperative for a linguist to know what language is. Language is a very complex human phenomenon; all attempts to define it have proved inadequate. In a nut-shell, language is an 'organised noise' used in actual social situations. That is why it has also been defined as 'contextualized systematic sounds.'

According to an ancient linguist of India, Patanjali, language is that human expression which is uttered out by speech organs. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol 13, language is defined as "a system of conventional, spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as member of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate." Some other definitions which are currently popular in linguistic circle are as follows —

(I) Language is a primarily human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols."

Sapir, Language, 1921

(II) "Language in its widest sense means the sum total of such signs of our thoughts and feelings as are capable of external perception and as could be produced and repeated at will"

— A.H. Gardiner, *Speech and Language*, 1935.

(III) "Language may be defined as the expression of thought by means of speech-sounds."

— Henry Sweet, *The History of Language*.

(IV) A Language is a device that establishes sound-meaning correlations, pairing meanings with signals to enable people to exchange ideas through observable sequences of sound."

— Ronald W. Langacker, *Language & Its Structure*, 1967.

Anthropologists regard language as a form of cultural behaviour, sociologists as an interaction between members of social group, students of literature as an artistic medium, philosophers as a means of interpreting human experience, language teachers as a set of skills. Truly, language is such a complex phenomenon that to define it in terms of a single level as knowledge, behaviour, skill, habit, an event or an object, can not solve the problem of its definition. None of the above definitions are perfect. Each of them just hints at certain characteristics of language.